

## Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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SUBJ: BAPTIST MISSIONARIES TO LEAVE CAE

1. THE PRESIDENT OF THE BAPTIST MID-MISSION, THE REV. KNUTE ORTON, HAS INFORMED THE EMBASSY OF THE INTENTION OF THE BAPTIST MISSIONARIES IN THE CAE TO WIND UP THEIR OPERATIONS IN THE NEAR FUTURE. THE FIRST FAMILIES TO DEPART WILL LEAVE BANGUI NEXT WEEK.

2. THE CAUSE OF THE DECISION TO ABANDON OVER FIFTY YEARS OF EVANGELICAL AND SOCIAL WORK IN CENTRAL AFRICA IS ESSENTIALLY THE MISSIONARIES' CONVICTION THAT THEY CAN NO LONGER WORK IN A COOPERATIVE SPIRIT EITHER WITH THE GOCAE OR WITH THE LOCAL AFRICAN CHURCHES. THE MID-MISSION IN RECENT MONTHS HAS BEEN INCREASINGLY HARASSED BY A DISSIDENT GROUP OF PASTORS WHICH HAS SEIZED TWO MISSION PROPERTIES IN THE EASTERN CAE AT BANGASSOU AND OUANGO. THE GOVERNMENT HAS CONFIRMED THE SEIZURES AND HAS REFUSED TO TAKE STEPS TO RETURN THE PROPERTIES TO MID-MISSION CONTROL. MORE RECENTLY A CONFERENCE OF BLACK AFRICAN PASTORS ESTABLISHED A NATIONAL BAPTIST FEDERATION. UNDER THE ARTICLES OF ASSOCIATION OF THE ORGANIZATION, THE CENTRAL AFRICAN CHURCH WOULD HAVE THE RIGHT TO VETOALL MISSIONARY NOMINATIONS, WOULD DETERMINE MISSION-ARY POSTINGS AND HAVE THE RIGHT TO DISMISS MISSIONARIES -- IN SUM WOULD BE THE EFFECTIVE SUPERVISING BODY OVER ALL MISSIONARY

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ACTIVITIES. THE BAPTISTS ARE NOT PREPARED TO ACCEPT SUCH A DRAMATIC REVERSAL OF ROLES PARTICULARLY WHEN SEVERAL POINTS OF DOCTRINAL DIFFERENCE HAVE ALSO EMERGED, PARTICULARLY THE AMERICAN OPPOSITION TO THE AFRICAN DESIRE FOR A HIERARCHAL STRUCTURE AND THEIR INSISTANCE ON THE STRICT AUTONOMY OF EACH LOCAL CHURCH. WHAT PARTICULARLY CONCERNS THE MISSIONARIES IS THEIR CONVICTION THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS BEHIND THE NEW ARTICLES OF ASSOCIATION.

THESE ARTICLES WERE DRAFTED IN FRENCH, ALTHOUGH FEW PASTORS KNOW FRENCH, AND WERE RAMMED THROUGH THE CONFERENCE WITHOUT MISSIONARY PARTICIPATION OR EVEN CONSULTATION. REV. ORTON HAS WRITTEN TO PRIME MINISTER PATASSE INFORMING HIM OF THE SITUATION AND INDICATING THE MID-MISSIONARY'S DECISION TO WITHDRAW.

3. MANY OF THE BAPTIST MISSIONARIES ARE CONVINCED THAT, RATHER THAN LOSE VALUABLE SOCIAL AND MEDICAL SERVICES, SUCH AS THE HOSPITAL AT IPPY, THE GOCAE WILL PUT PRESSURE ON THE CENTRAL AFRICAN PASTORS TO GET THEM TO MODIFY THE NEW CONSTITUTION. OTHERS HOPE THAT THE PASTORS THEMSELVES WILL COME ROUND AND REQUEST THE MISSIONARIES TO STAY WHEN THEY SEE HOW MUCH THEY WILL LOSE IN TERMS OF REVENUES AND SERVICES. THE MISSIONARIES HAVE SET JUNE 10 AS THE DATE ON WHICH THEY WILL TAKE A FINAL DECISION. IF THEY HAVE NO GOVERNMENT RESPONSE OR NO REQUEST TO REMAIN, THEY WILL BEGIN THE COMPLICATED PROCESS OF DISPOSING OF THEIR AFFAIRS. ACCORDING TO ORTON, THEY WOULD AGREE TO STAY IF THE GOVERNMENT RESCINDED THE SEIZURES AT OUANGO AND BANGASSOU AND ALLOWED THE MISSIONARIES TO OPERATE COMPLETELY INDEPENDENTLY OF THE NEW BAPTIST FEDERATION. EVEN IF THEIR CONDITIONS ARE MET SOME MISSIONARIES WILL STILL LEAVE, BUT THE MAJORITY WOULD STAY ON.

4. COMMENT: OTHER MISSIONARIES IN THE CAE ARE DEEPLY DISTURBED AT WHAT THEY SEE TO BE A PRECIPITOUS BAPTIST DECISION. WE DO NOT THINK, HOWEVER, THAT THEIR ACTIVITIES WILL BE IMMEDIATELY AFFECTED IF THE BAPTISTS LEAVE. NONETHELESS, EVEN IF SOME MODUS VIVENDI WERE TO BE WORKED OUT TO PERMIT THE BAPTISTS TO STAY, WHICH WILL BE DIFFICULT GIVEN THE TOUGH POSITIONS STAKED OUT ON BOTH SIDES, WE FORESEE CONTINUING PROBLEMS. CENTRAL AFRICANS NOW LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BELIEVE THAT THE BAPTIST MISSIONARIES ARE OUT OF STEP WITH MODERN AFRICA, UNWILLING TO ADAPT TO THE REALITIES OF AFRICANISATION AND RELUCTANT TO SURRENDER EITHER PROPERTY OR CONTROL OVER CHURCH OPERATIONS. THE CENTRAL AFRICANS WILL REMAIN SUSPICIOUS OF BAPTIST MOTIVES AND INTENTIONS. THE OTHER EVANGELICAL MISSIONARIES HAVE ALREADY MOVED TO ANTICIPATE THE PROBLEM BY HANDING OVER THEIR PROPERTY TO THE LOCAL CHURCH AND BY AGREEING TO A DEGREE OF JOINT AMERICAN-AFRICAN ADMINISTRATION. THERE IS ALSO GROWING AND GENERAL CRITICISM OF MISSIONARY LIFE STYLE. MODEST THOUGH IT IS IN MANY WAYS, IT STILL SURPASSES BY FAR THAT OF AFRICAN PASTORS AND RESENTMENTS ON THIS SCORE ARE LIKELY TO INCREASE.

5. IF THE BAPTISTS DEPART IT WILL MARK THE END OF AN ERA IN THEIR CONTACTS WITH CENTRAL AFRICA, WHICH BEGAN IN 1920. ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE NOT ENTIRELY MOVED WITH THE TIMES, THEY HAVE CREATED A NETWORK OF INDIGENOUS BAPTIST CHURCHES, WHICH WILL LONG OUTLIVE THEM, AS WELL AS A SYSTEM OF BIBLE SCHOOLS AND DISPENSARIES. THEY WILL HAVE LEFT A PERMANENT MARK ON THIS REMOTE CORNER OF AFRICA.

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